

Online game is record-breaking probability research

9 September 2011 - A research project investigating how people respond to probabilities in weather forecasts has become the largest of its kind ever carried out after thousands of people logged on to play an online game.

Carried out by the Met Office and the Universities of Bristol and Cambridge, it is hoped the project will reveal how best to present probabilities in weather forecasts.



The use of probabilities in weather forecasting has been a topic of debate for many years but there is little in the way of research on how to present the extra information contained in these forecasts.

So far the game, which sees players helping Brad the ice-cream man by providing probability-based weather advice, has been played nearly 8,000 times.

The scientists leading the project are hoping that more people can take part to give even more comprehensive results.

Liz Stephens, leader of the project from the University of Bristol, said the preliminary results had already shown some interesting trends.

She said: "Early indications show that there are certainly some ways of presenting probabilities that are more easily understood than others, but the group of people that are presented with probabilities on average score higher than those who are not.

"But these results are not necessarily the same across the board, for example early indications show that average scores on the game decrease with age and that in the 55+ age group, women score significantly higher than men.

"These are early results and could change, but give an example of the kind of understanding we're hoping to build up around how people interpret probabilities."

Ken Mylne, Met Office Ensemble Forecasting Manager, said "We are constantly looking at ways to help people make better use of our forecasts. This game is already giving us some very useful ideas but we would like many more people to play it to ensure we identify the best methods for different audiences."

The weather game takes approximately 5 minutes to complete. Each day players of the game will be entered into a prize draw to win a Met Office T-shirt.

Contact information

Met Office Press Office: **+44 (0)1392 886655**

E-mail: [Press Office](#)

Met Office Customer Centre: **01392 885680**

If you're outside the UK: **+44 1392 885680**

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